1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER V

CHARACTER

'Without exception they are the most cheerful, light-hearted people I have met with, always laughing and joking among themselves. Seldom does a Maria village resound with quarrels or wrangling among either sex: and in this respect they present a marked contrast to those in more civilized tracts. They, in common with many other wild races, bear a singular character for truthfulness and honesty, and when once they get over the feeling of shyness, which is natural to them, they are exceedingly frank and communicative. Curious as all savages, the commonest article of domestic use is to them an object of interest; they are quick to observe and to learn.'—Glasfurd's 1862 Report, para. 89.

'In their own hills they are a bold and hardy race, industrious as cultivators, and truthful to a proverb; and, though shy and timid with those they do not know, are quickly won over by kindness. They form, indeed, not only one of the most interesting, but one of the most improvable of the aboriginal tribes of India.'—Lucie-Smith's 1869 Chanda Settlement Report, para. 111.

MERCIFULLY the Hill Marias and, to a less extent, the Bison-horn Marias have been spared the attention of the improver, and hitherto have been left fairly free to develop on their own lines and to adjust themselves to the increasing impact of modern India on the surrounding lowlands. The shyness already mentioned is still very marked in the hills, and also among the remoter villages not only of Bison-horn Marias and Koyas, but also of Parjas and Murias. But the ordinary Bison-horn Maria of the open tracts, with the steady expansion of communications and frequent visits by the Chief and the Diwan to the Bailadila hills, has come more and more into contact with the outer world; he often comes into Jagdalpur for Dasehra or market or to work on the public works, or even to show his children the sights of the '*sahar*' or 'city', especially the power-house and the pumps of the new waterworks.

In the Abujhmar hills all is well if visitors are expected. Otherwise, as in Glasfurd's day, all the inhabitants are liable to rush off into the jungle on the sudden appearance of an unusual number of persons or a white man. When marching from Orcha to Adeq (Ader) in Chhota Dongar Mar *pargana* in February 1930, I left the main path to see the village of Tondawada. I was not expected in the village, and though I had with me a number of Maria youths from Orcha well known to several women of Tondawada, yet my approach was the signal for a general *sauve-qui-peut*; the dogs barked, the few cattle were hastily driven off into the hills, and women and boys fled helter-skelter to the hills, even including

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

609 a large party of women who had assembled to keen over an old woman who had just died. Pigs also were driven off, and a youth, 157 who was caught lurking near us to 'rescue' three stray cows and brought to me, advanced to me as delicately as Agag, with his knife unsheathed and held in readiness to defend his life. This lad was quickly reassured and shouted out, whereupon to our surprise four or five other lads came down from trees around us, where they had taken shelter, their curiosity being on the whole stronger than their fear. Ultimately the women felt that the corpse could not be left unmourned any longer, and came back in twos and threes to be reassured by the boys. They were then in two minds whether to resume keening or to see as much as possible of the queer ways of so unheard-of an apparition as a white man. When I came to see the keening it was altogether too much, and they at once left the body and crowded round me; when I had it explained that I wanted to see how funerals were conducted and to photograph them, they very obligingly squatted down in their original places, and began even more doleful keenings than before. It seemed only proper to remove my distracting presence as soon as I could, but the keeners were with difficulty dissuaded from seeing me on my way to Adeq.

Timidity of this kind is unusual among the Bison-horn Marias; but there are many villages among them where few women can have seen a white man. To appear on foot or on a car along a forest road where groups of women are gathering forest fruits is usually the signal for them to rush off into the thickets, leaving their baskets and gear: but if you return that way later after having spent an hour or two in neighbouring villages, they will come timidly out to you on the road, and gradually lose their earlier fears.

152 The highlanders and lowlanders alike are extremely curious. In the Abujhmar hills I have frequently had parties of men, youths and girls coming into my tent or hut to see my strange ways of getting up, shaving and dressing, and their curiosity has been embarrassing when they have tried to watch even the performance of natural functions. I have had to brush my hair a dozen times over to satisfy those who had not seen me do it the first time, and to demonstrate the use of every article on my dressing or office tables. They will sit for hours watching a typewriter, and speculating on how it works. A motor-car is a source of endless delight, whether it be the distorted reflections seen in the polished radiator, or the noises of the bulb and electric horns. They thump it to test its materials, or crawl underneath to be fascinated by the strange sights that reward their trouble. But it takes time to get them to agree to try a ride inside, and when they do, they start off with

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

a fearful pride, but soon lose their fear, and try to crowd into the seats; their women, however, are as reluctant to risk entering a car as any old village woman in Cornwall thirty-five years ago. It was a pleasure later in the day to see the bold adventurers of the morning who watched the white man's toilet operations conducting parties of sight-seers into the tent and pantomiming the use of brush, razor and everything there. The Bison-horn Maria is more sophisticated, and will not intrude without being asked, nor is he so curious about small things; but a motor-car is as great a draw to him as to the hill men. Both are very interested in seeing a carburettor stripped and assembled or a tyre changed, or any mechanical repairs; they show quick intelligence, and could soon be taught. In the spate of bridge building on the State roads in recent years they have been quick to grasp methods of sinking piles or getting great beams into position, and have not been slow to offer suggestions that have sometimes been practicable. The newly built road bridge over the Indrawati at Jagdalpur is really built according to the same method as the bridges which even Hill Marias construct across their rivers, with modern and stronger materials and other improvements.

My inquisitiveness about their houses, habits, possessions, agriculture and customs in their eyes must seem much like their curiosity about my ways. Actually their mental processes are not unlike ours, when allowance is made for their centuries of isolation; they are certainly more receptive than the ordinary villager of British India, whose thought has for generations been stunted by the cumbrous wrappings of caste and debased Hinduism. A striking instance of this is the comparative ease with which vaccination was made compulsory years ago throughout the State and is welcomed by the Marias, in strong contrast to the keen opposition to it even in the cities of British India and to the caution venturing on timidity with which provincial Governments make tentative advances in the direction of universal compulsion. Not only is vaccination really universal even in the hill villages, but the Marias are keenly alive to the advantages of inoculation for cholera and yaws, and, in fact, are inclined to demand '*tika*' or inoculation for every ailment, those of them, that is, who have seen for themselves cholera checked or yaws cured by injections; for till recently no medical relief other than vaccination had reached the hills.

In natural cheerfulness few races can surpass the Hill Marias, who, like all Gonds, are quick to see the fun of things, whether it be something that spontaneously appeals to their sense of humour, or a joke put to them by some outsider. Their humour is apt to be broad. Very few serious disputes arise in Abujhmar, where a

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

for a tooth; but nowadays this is generally satisfied by invoking the police and the courts. But distances are great in Bastar, and in the rains, when the early hill grains are ripe, communications are bad; often the villagers conspire to hush up a murder or leave it to those affected to take their own direct action, rather than disorganize agricultural work by the troubles of a long police enquiry followed by committal proceedings and a sessions trial.

It is a relief to return from this darker side of the Bison-horn Maria's character to the light-heartedness of all Marias, but especially the Hill Maria. An engaging feature of this is his readiness to burlesque himself. A village *gaita* (headman) at Tondawada set the whole camp in fits of laughter by his description of his first vain attempts to use a pair of bullocks in the plough, mimicking himself pulled hither and thither by these wild-cat animals; at Hikul I was treated to a similar comic representation of what would happen if a Maria attempted to milk a cow. They are quick to seize on any foibles or peculiarities of individuals, without respect of persons, and have a happy knack of inventing apposite nicknames; this trait is common throughout the State, where there are nicknames for almost every State official current among all the primitive tribes, while few of the leading Hindu and Mohammedan settlers are referred to by their true names.

Frankness and honesty are still as characteristic as ever of the hill men and the wilder Bison-horn Marias, and many a man arraigned for homicide will state in court perfectly frankly why it was essential to kill his victim and how it was done. I have very seldom found any hesitate to answer any questions, even about the most intimate domestic matters. The Bison-horn Maria, however, being, at least in the open tracts, more sophisticated, is inclined to be suspicious; and he certainly is learning the ways of the courts, and how to defeat a justice administered on the evidence and not according to the facts; many know, for example, that the death penalty may be escaped if you can convince your judge that you murdered your victim because you believed him to be bewitching you. But in general a Maria witness can still be relied upon to speak the truth, although it involve his dearest relatives or himself in trouble; and the occasional pleader from British India is soon hopelessly at sea if he tries his usual methods of cross-examination even on a Bison-horn Maria who knows Halbi. Fortunately, the restoration of the criminal and civil jurisdiction of the village and *pargana* panchayats will considerably reduce Maria experience of the law courts. The Hill Maria never has had much recourse to them, petty theft being almost unknown and murder rare. His attitude may to some extent be gauged by the following example.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

We may then consider how the ghotul boys and girls are almost completely free from those furtive and unpleasant vices that so mar our Western civilization. There is hardly any masturbation, the scourge of the English Public Schools; where it is practised, it is due to the mistaken efforts of reformers to improve the ghotul. Prostitution is unknown, unthinkable. No motiari has ever given her body for money. Homosexuality, sodomy, bestiality are shocking things, unworthy of chelik or motiari and never indulged by them. Nor does Muria society know the thin frustrated spinster or the male neurotic so prolific in the modern Indian 'ashram', with his desiccated outlook and censorious judgements.

These are great gains. At the same time we must not forget that there are many things in our own society which would shock and offend the Muria. A chelik would be scandalized by the Public Schools in England—the atmosphere of competition, the corporal punishment, the bullying, the petty tyranny of senior boys, the segregation with its attendant vices, the common homosexual interests, the furtiveness of association with girls, the worship of sport which has no connexion with real life. The prostitution in our cities would seem to him an abomination, and he would be filled with pity for the unmarried together with a dread of what would happen to them after death.

He would find a wholesale disregard of right and proper taboos. The missionary probably kisses his mother and sister, and certainly allows his wife to cook and touch water during her menstrual period—things which would horrify the Muria. The Hindu is often criticized by the Muria for allowing his children to sleep in the same room as their parents, which the Muria thinks far more immoral than sending them to sleep with other children in the ghotul. The sanitary arrangements of many a Brahmin home offend the Muria and he considers the Hindu attitude to untouchables, widow-remarriage and purdah as unworthy and degrading. If he is reflective enough, he will equally insist that the Westerner whose civilization is characterized by all the anti-social vices, violence, jealousy, adultery, and war, is not in a position to criticize his quiet, peaceful, happy, useful ghotul.

Although observers of similar institutions in other cultures have generally been impressed by their virtues and social value, there have been exceptions. In an early work S. C. Roy called the Uraon dormitory an 'abomination',[1] though I believe his opinion altered later. Dalton thought that intercourse in a dormitory 'must sadly blunt all innate feelings of delicacy'.[2] In a very early account of the Seneca Indians of Canada, Cartier says, 'They have a very bad custom with their daughters, for as soon as they are of age to go to man, they put them in a bawdy-house, and abandon them to anyone who will take them, until they meet with a suitable party. And this we have seen by experience, for we saw those houses as full of girls as a school in France is full of children'.[3]

In the Marianne Islands, the missionaries found themselves opposed by the Uritoi *maisons des célibataires* and, regarding only the sexual relations of the girls and boys, declared that '*le Démon a établi icy des Seminaires de débauche*', while another writer described the purpose of the Uritoi societies of Guam as '*un épicurisme grossier*'.[4]

[1] Roy, *The Oraons*, p. 211.
[2] Dalton, op. cit., p. 248.
[3] J. Cartier, *Brief récit de la navigation faict en MCDXXXV et MCDXXXVI*, first published in Paris in 1654. Quoted by Briffault, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 34.
[4] Quoted from Le Gobien, *Histoire des Iles Mariones*, p. 61, and L. de Freycinet, *Voyage autour du Monde* (Paris, 1826–44), Vol. II, p. 369 by Hutton Webster, op. cit., p. 169.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER SIX

THE CAUSES OF CRIME: MARITAL INFIDELITY

I

836 157 The Maria allow their women a great deal of freedom in their pre-nuptial period, but for matrimonial relationships they have a strict regard. They are jealous and possessive by temperament, passionate as lovers,[1] suspicious and

[301]

Maria girls' neck-band

exacting husbands. Divorce is rare; adultery is dangerous, a crime the end of which cannot be foreseen.

837 Adultery is dangerous, for unless proper precautions are taken the ancestors of the household and the clan-god may

[1] But as elsewhere in India 'lust-murder' does not occur. 'Lust-murder, as one of the phenomena of psychopathia sexualis, appears to be better known in the more highly cultured countries of the West than in the East, where capital offences have their basis in less recondite mental processes'. S. M. Edwardes, *Crime in India* (Oxford, 1924), p. 28.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CONCLUSION

I

The reader who has examined the many different crimes recorded in this book cannot fail to be struck by the astonishing innocence of many of them. Compared to the dark and complicated wickedness of so many European murders, compared to the fundamental savagery of the actions of such men as Palmer or Orsini, most of these crimes appear almost accidental. In some cases the culprit regards himself as an executioner rather than a murderer. He believes his act to have been entirely justified. In others simple people despairing of making their cause understood in the courts, which use another language and whose ways and outlook are so different from theirs, take the law into their own hands. But of criminals, in the real sense of the word, there are few. Few of the convicts in the Jagdalpur jail would be fit heroes or villains of a detective story.

No one should suppose that, because this book is concerned with violent crime, the Maria themselves are equally preoccupied with the subject. There are a great many Maria, at least 175,000 of them. They live scattered over a vast area half the size of Holland. There are on an average only 12 true homicides every year. The great majority of the people live quiet, peaceful, hard-working lives. Even on the most uncharitable evaluation, their addiction to violence is only remarkable when compared to their immediate neighbours, who are some of the most pacific and gentle people on this planet. It is no doubt true that the Maria are jealous, quick-tempered, passionate, revengeful. Their faults and their virtues are those of strength, not of weakness. It is from such a tribe that we might look one day for creative genius, for positive, explosive, advanced ideas.

It is sometimes debated in Bastar whether anything can be done to wean the Maria from violence. I doubt it. For example, an important cause of murder is fear of witchcraft and magic. Eliminate this fear, and the number of murders

157
[p. 215]